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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 001469

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/11/2016

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SUBJECT: ISRAELI CABINET DISCUSSES "BOYCOTT" OF PA AND
STATUS OF GAZA CROSSINGS

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones; Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

1. (C) Summary: The Israeli Cabinet announced April 11 that it will "hold no ties" with the Palestinian Authority, but that "there will be no personal disavowal" of PA President Mahmud Abbas. The Cabinet also imposed a "boycott" of foreign officials who plan to meet with Hamas and GOI officials on the same trip to the region. PMO foreign policy adviser Shalom Tourgeman told the Ambassador that this means USG and other foreign officials will still be able to meet with both Abbas and GOI officials during visits to the region. Tourgeman added that the GOI will not discuss any substantive issues with Abbas. Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said that he had made it clear to DefMin Shaul Mofaz that the Karni crossing is to remain open unless there is a concrete and specific threat against the facility. Tourgeman once again pushed for PA acceptance of Kerem Shalom. End summary.

GOI Boycott of the PA

2. (C) The Israeli Cabinet approved April 11 a number of measures meant to isolate the PA. After the GOI meeting Olmert announced:

-- the PA is a "terrorist authority that is hostile to Israel;"
-- the GOI and its representatives "will not hold ties with the Palestinian Authority or its elements;"
-- the PA is one authority, "therefore neither the Palestinian Authority Chairman nor his office will be treated any differently;"
-- however, "there will be no personal disavowal" of Abbas;
-- foreign officials who meet with "Hamas elements" will not be received on the same visit by the GOI; and
-- the GOI will coordinate humanitarian assistance for the Palestinians with the international community but not with the PA.

3. (C) The Ambassador discussed the boycott provisions with Tourgeman later that day. Tourgeman said the point on the PA President had been left intentionally vague to allow USG and other foreign officials to meet with Abbas and the GOI during the same visit. He insisted that the GOI would have no substantive discussions with anyone in the PA -- including Abbas and his staff -- because it deemed them to be both irrelevant and part of the Hamas-led "terrorist authority." The exception for Abbas was personal rather than for the office of the Presidency. The GOI could not exclude the possibility that some of the Presidency's staff might have ties to Hamas. During a meeting with Senator Lieberman and the Ambassador (prior to the discussion with Tourgeman), Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said that he had spoken with Abbas by phone a few days earlier. Olmert reiterated previous criticism that Abbas is unwilling to take the steps needed to get back to serious negotiations (septel).

4. (C) Tourgeman told the Ambassador that GOI concerns about upcoming visits by the South Africans and Russians had led to the "boycott" of foreign officials who meet with Hamas. Hillel Newman (protect), a policy adviser on FM Livni's staff, told poloff on April 10 that the boycott provisions are similar to ones the GOI imposed upon foreign government contact with Yassir Arafat during the Intifada. The GOI will still meet with foreign officials who have had contact with Hamas, provided these discussions occur on separate trips to the region or abroad. Newman noted that the GOI prefers a more robust boycott of those who have met with Hamas, but realizes that such a step would be impractical (he specifically mentioned the need to retain contacts with Russian FM Lavrov).

Karni and Kerem Shalom Crossings

5. (C) The Cabinet also announced that "subject to security considerations, the Gaza Strip crossings will be open in order to allow the entry of humanitarian assistance into the Gaza Strip." Following Olmert's meeting with Senator Lieberman, the Ambassador stressed the importance of keeping the crossings, especially Karni, open. Olmert said he had made a similar point at the Cabinet meeting and reiterated it

directly to DefMin Mofaz. Tourgeman insisted that the PA must also accept Kerem Shalom as an alternative crossing. Olmert assured the Ambassador that he agreed that the crossings should remain open barring concrete and specific security threats.

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